Interview with William L. Blue

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

WILLIAM L. BLUE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: This is April 11, 1991 and an interview with William L. Blue on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Mr. Blue I wonder if you could give me a little bit about your background—where you were born, grew up, and were educated?

BLUE: I was born in Memphis, Tennessee and my education was entirely in Memphis until I went to graduate school. I went to a small Presbyterian college called Southwestern, which has grown enormously since my day.

Q: You were born in 1914?

BLUE: Yes. Then I went to Vanderbilt for my Masters.

Q: This was about when?

BLUE: I would say that was in the fall of 1936. Since I was interested in the Foreign Service I applied to the Fletcher School and was accepted. I stayed there for two years but

didn't get a degree because I was mostly interested in going into the Foreign Service. That was the extent of my education.

Q: What attracted you, coming from the middle of the United States, to joining the Foreign Service?

BLUE: I have forgotten why I originally was interested, but I was interested fairly early in my teens. I remember writing to a fellow who was an ambassador-at-large and asking him about joining the Foreign Service. He wrote back and said to forget it unless I had a private fortune. Well, I wasn't willing to accept that. This was long before I went to the Fletcher School, but I maintained my interest. Fortunately I had an uncle who had traveled in Europe and was fascinated by the idea and, therefore, supported my idea and helped me with the balance of expenses after a scholarship.

Once I got to Fletcher School, I was determined. I took the writtens three times. I flunked the written the first time, which was held in St. Louis—the hottest place on earth in September. The second time, I passed the written but flunked the orals. I was pretty green. But interestingly enough one of the assistant secretaries, Breckinridge Long—can you imagine having three or four assistant secretaries on your board—encouraged me to take the exam again. They turned me down because my background was too academic. So, Breckinridge Long said, “Get around and get yourself a job and be sure to take the written examination again. Come back, because I think you should be in the Service.

Well, my father suggested that I go to see a friend who was well connected politically, and I got a job in the cotton stamp program in Memphis subject to obtaining a letter of recommendation from Senator McKellar. My friend said that the Senator would write such a letter for me. When I went to the Senator's office to pick up the letter I was told the Senator wanted to see me. He asked me why I had not passed. I told him that they had told me my background was too academic. He said, “Well, the fellow I sent up there the last time told me he didn't have enough education and now they say you have too much

education. I am going to call Breckinridge Long." I thought at that point that it was the end and I would never get into the Foreign Service. He called Mr. Long who obviously told him, "Look, Senator, you voted for the law which requires that people take exams, and Mr. Blue will have to take the exam again." I did, and passed.

Q: You showed persistence, etc. Part of this is just gaining a little more experience in the world, a little more maturity. Well, when did you come into the Foreign Service?

BLUE: In 1941. I passed the exams in January and then was sent of all places to a small consulate in Niagara Falls, Canada. Of course, the war was on the way and they were not sending people to Europe.

Q: How long were you in Niagara Falls?

BLUE: I got there in June '41 and must have left in August of '42.

Q: What were you doing there?

BLUE: It was all consular work. I don't know whether the Consul General, who had been in Shanghai, did any political reporting or not. We had an awful system in those days. I was a career officer, therefore I was the next officer down from the Consul General and there were three non-career people. That wasn't quite fair. I didn't know the difference between a visa and a passport. So he brings me in and treats me as if I were his deputy. And those poor guys; one of them had been in Milan for 25 years—this was the old system before they had the Foreign Service Staff category—and they stick him in Niagara Falls. He and his wife were miserable—his wife probably more than he was. We had a mail clerk who had been in Paris for 30 years and here she is sitting in this funny little town in Canada, which wasn't really very Canadian, and miserable. It was a very bad system. I learned a great deal and did my best to make these people feel that it wasn't my idea to be put in there over them. But it was a good experience for me.

Q: Then your next post was in Latin America, is that correct?

BLUE: Yes. Apparently Sumner Wells, this is the story I was told, decided that we should have someone in the interior of Venezuela watching the Venezuelans of German origin who were interned in the interior of Venezuela mostly down below this little town Ciudad Bolivar. So I was sent down there. It was a silly idea. I didn't know any Spanish. I learned some Spanish and it was a very good experience because the town had about 2,000 people and I soon knew everybody of any importance there. There were lots of people from Corsica. The major figures financially in this little town were from Corsica.

Q: For one thing when I saw on your list that you were in Ciudad Bolivar, I couldn't figure out where this was. I had never heard of it before.

BLUE: There is no reason why you should have. It is fairly far up the Orinoco and was called Angostura originally because it is at the very narrowest part of the river which is about 300 ft. deep there. Angostura bitters were first made there.

Q: I was going to say that Angostura bitters was a well known ingredient of Manhattan cocktails.

BLUE: Yes. As a matter of fact they were first made there and then they moved to Trinidad. Frank Morgan, who was a comedian in the movies, his family's name was Wupperman, the family which still owns Angostura Bitters.

Q: Frank Morgan played the wizard in the "Wizard of Oz."

BLUE: Yes.

Q: Were you doing anything there?

BLUE: Well, I picked up a bit of information from people, but the amusing thing was...I got to be a very good friend of one of the Spaniards there. He was giving information to the

military attach#, and the naval attach# and they were both paying him—and he gave me information, probably the same information, but I didn't have anything to pay him with. The attach#s wouldn't spend the night there. They were stationed in Caracas which they found much more interesting. There were nice young women up there and they went to dances and had a great time.

Q: You were a single man then?

BLUE: I was single, yes. It was pretty dull. The single girls there were pretty hopeless.

Q: You must have been rather restless because the war was going on, it was an exciting period and here you are sitting in the center of Venezuela.

BLUE: I did travel further into the interior several times. There was no picking up of any information. None of the information I sent back was earth shaking. We didn't even have a code I could use. I used the navy code. I was only there from September '42 until May of '44. Then I was transferred to Naples.

Q: You went in 1944 to Naples which had been...

BLUE: Naples was the first consulate to be opened in previously occupied Europe. It was fascinating, of course. The war was still on.

Q: When did you get to Naples?

BLUE: May of 1944.

Q: When had the Salerno invasion taken place?

BLUE: That was considerably earlier. To give you some idea the front was still at the famous Monte Cassino. We could still hear the guns from Monte Cassino. Rome was freed in June of that year.

Q: What was the situation like in Naples? I might add that I have somewhat of an interest because my last job overseas was Consul General in Naples.

BLUE: When I arrived there were no street lights, no street cars, no taxis and a blackout, of course. The German planes used to come over. We had air raid warnings but there were no bombers, or at least they weren't going to waste bombs on Naples. People would go down into the air raid shelters but I got so that I didn't go down. We had people like Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Madeleine Carroll and Marlene Dietrich. Just imagine Marlene Dietrich in an air raid shelter at 3 in the morning looking like a million dollars. It was fascinating because as soon as the war was over things very quickly started to improve.

Q: What were you doing when you first arrived?

BLUE: I was doing purely consular work.

Q: What type of consular work?

BLUE: I was doing American citizenship. American citizens were coming through the lines from northern Italy, many of them were American wives who had stayed with their Italian husbands. I can remember one lady who stayed with her husband. They owned a hotel near Sorrento and she wanted to go back to the U.S. We had to document these people. A lot of them were in refugee camps. They were really peasants who had stayed but who wanted to visit relatives in the States and who thought they had a legitimate claim to citizenship. However, we had to take their applications and determine whether their claim was legitimate. I would say that in those days the American citizenship section was larger than the visa section. We repatriated people on the Gripsholm for example.

Q: The Gripsholm being a neutral Swedish ship that used to ply around and exchange diplomats and others.

BLUE: The only time I was on board was when the Consul General had a party.

Q: Who was Consul General at the time?

BLUE: George Brandt. He was a real character. He tended to be very gruff, but he was really a teddy bear. Quite a decent fellow and I liked him very much. Most people liked him, although one of my colleagues trembled at the thought of even having to go to see him. I tried to tell him that this was all a front, and that Brandt was really a very decent fellow.

Q: Did you have much contact with the American military there?

BLUE: Yes. Actually I was certifying all civilians to go on aircraft flying in and out of Naples. We had a lot of contact with the military. We had to get a lot of material from them—had to get food from them. I lived for quite a while in the Parker Hotel, which was a field officers mess. I suppose all the civilians were there. I remember the entertainers, like Douglas Fairbanks and Madeleine Carroll, used to have breakfast with us so they must have been accommodating almost all the civilians there.

Q: Were there any Italian authorities there?

BLUE: We still had the, what do you call that branch of the armed services which deals with civilians?

Q: It was AMGOT or something.

BLUE: We had that crook from New York City.

Q: Lucky Luciano.

BLUE: I documented Lucky to go back to the States to be incarcerated. No, I was thinking of a big politician in New York. He was a member of Tammany Hall.

Q: Well, we can fill it in later.

BLUE: In any case, they were still there although there was an Italian mayor because I remember John Cabot Lodge, who was married to an Italian, called on the mayor when he visited Naples. The mayor's office was near our office. It was full of people, I don't know what they were doing.

We had interesting times because the Communists were very active. I remember on one occasion, Tony Cuomo, who was an Italian-American, and I went down to watch. There was a crowd of people around the Communist headquarters and they were about to burn the place down. The crowd got out of hand and, I suppose these were police, they may have been former Italian military police who were under American officers, fired over the heads of the crowd. I am telling you this crowd moved. I thought Tony and I were going to get flattened.

But there was very little danger being there at that point. I moved out of the Parker Hotel to a little—they were still requisitioned quarters—place out in Possilipo.

Q: When the war was ended in the spring of '45, did things change much?

BLUE: They changed pretty fast. You had night clubs opening, the city was beginning to function as an Italian city. Street cars running. I was amazed at how quickly things began to return to normal. Even the tennis club opened. For example, when I first got there Eisenhower and Bob Murphy were still at Caserta where the Allied Headquarters were.

Q: That is about 50 miles to the north, a big Bourbon palace. A beautiful place.

BLUE: In Naples, the Consulate General was right on the Via Roma, originally. Actually, originally in the Galeria Umberto. There was no glass in the Galeria Umberto.

Q: This is very famous right in the heart of town—an enclosed gallery.

BLUE: There was no glass and the rain just poured in. It was near the San Carlo Opera House. Later, the Consulate General moved to Banco del Lavoro which was further up the Via Roma. Behind us was the Peninsular Base Command. Later, they moved north so that the military was less and less important in Naples even before the end of the war—particularly after Rome fell. By the time I left I would say Naples was functioning pretty much as a normal city—as normal as you can get having just gone through such a traumatic experience as they had.

Q: When did you leave Naples?

BLUE: In March of 1948.

Q: Were you there for the preparations for or the actual famous election of '48 in which we put an awful lot of pressure to make sure Italy didn't go communist?

BLUE: It must have been later because I don't seem to remember doing anything. I remember the election because even when I went to Malaya I was still interested in Italy and followed things like that in the press.

Q: Naples won a certain amount of renown by voting for the king...

BLUE: They were monarchists down there. I watched Victor Emmanuel and his wife leave...they were staying out in the Villa Roseberry—and I watched them get on a British destroyer and they went off to Egypt. Then Umberto was king for a very short time.

Q: Next you went in 1948 for a very short time to Kuala Lumpur. What were you doing there?

BLUE: I was the first consul in Kuala Lumpur. I went first to Alexandria by ship and then was in Cairo for a week and in Port Said for a week waiting for a ship to Singapore.

Q: You were principal officer there, weren't you?

BLUE: I was principal officer.

Q: Of course Kuala Lumpur in those days was part of...

Mr. Blue. It was the capital of Malaya which was still a British colony. But within a month after I got there the communists came out of the jungle. If they had had better intelligence, they could have taken over Kuala Lumpur, but they didn't. It was a fascinating period. This was before Templar. The British were completely unprepared for this emergency. I had the Americans, like the head of the Pacific Tin Company, after me all the time to get up there and tell the British what they had to do. When I left, it was very risky to go from Kuala Lumpur up to the hill stations. Not long after I left, Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner, was ambushed and killed on his way to a hill station.

Q: Here you were and found yourself as principal officer in a place which in those days was of only modest concern to the United States. What were you expected to do with this uprising going on?

BLUE: You had to depend on British sources, although there was an interesting guy there—a labor advisor to Sir Henry. He had been a railroad driver. He was in touch with the commies and knew quite a lot about what was going on. Somehow we got along very well. So I did get some information about what the thinking was on the other side. The whole colonial apparatus was there and some of them resented the fact that we had a consulate there. I wanted to go up to the installation of the new Sultan in Trengano but the British political advisor there turned down my request. They wanted things to remain as they had been.

Q: Did you have the feeling while you were there that whatever happened the colonial system was on the way out?

BLUE: Yes. They had a legislative assembly which I went to regularly. And the Malays were becoming more important. I was pretty sure the British were on their way out.

Q: Were you getting any instructions from Washington or was it pretty much a matter of sending in your reports?

BLUE: Not specific instructions as I recall. Fortunately we had good relations with the British High Commissioner. He was a very decent man. He actually used to brief me and was fairly open about what was going on. But we didn't have any instructions saying, “You should do this and you should do that.” There was no question that something was going to happen.

Q: But the United States basically exerted no pressure there.

BLUE: We didn't press them as I gather we did in New Delhi and places like that.

Q: Did the change over in India have any rumbling effect, I think India gained its independence about that time?

BLUE: No, I don't recall that it did. It was in 1947 when they had all those riots and got their independence, and I didn't get there until May of 1948. I don't remember that the situation in India had any effect on us.

Q: You left Kuala Lumpur around 1949.

BLUE: I left in September. My father was dying and I wanted to get back to the States. For one thing I wanted to get married. I was tired of being a bachelor and there was certainly nothing available out there. So I asked originally to return home at my own expense, but while I was back there I was called into Washington and told that I would be assigned to Personnel as I had requested a Washington assignment.

Q: I note you were in the Department from 1949 until 1952. Were you in Personnel during that period?

BLUE: The whole time, yes.

Q: This was a very critical period because of the McCarthy business.

BLUE: It was pretty awful too. The McCarthy business wasn't noticed particularly until the Eisenhower Administration came in. But we noticed it in Delhi because people were coming in one day and leaving the next. It was a terrible period.

Q: During the Truman time which was up until '52, which really covered most of the time you were in Personnel, there were these security problems.

BLUE: Oh, yes. Peurifoy was hand in glove with the crowd. People were being brought back before I went to Delhi. People were being brought back and a number of them were homosexuals, but a lot of them were in cultural work and some of the best people we had. All of their efficiency reports were excellent and they were doing a wonderful job. It was done very crudely.

Q: Who was running it in the Department? Was it Peurifoy?

BLUE: Sure.

Q: What was his background? He later became an ambassador.

BLUE: He started out running an elevator up on the Hill. I don't know what he was before that. He was a real political operator. He was in league with certain elements on the Hill. He was in league with McCarthy's colleagues. I wonder when McCarthy got into his stride. I would say after I went to Delhi.

Q: Well, after Eisenhower came in, what were you doing in Personnel?

BLUE: I was handling at first, for a very short time, personnel in Spain and Portugal. Then I was deputy in the Near Eastern and Africa areas and later in charge of assignments in those areas.

Q: Who was in charge of Personnel in those days?

BLUE: It was rather a poor system. Back in 1948 Peurifoy and others decided to upset the whole Foreign Service system. The director general in those days was a very powerful figure. They replaced him. All the Foreign Service officers in Personnel resigned from their jobs and asked to be sent overseas and they were. By the time I got there you had a very strange setup. Pete Martin was overall in charge of personnel matters with several underlings under him. Don Smith was the guy in charge of Foreign Service personnel. He was a hopeless fellow. All I remember is his pasty face and a red nose. The morale in the Service was pretty poor.

Q: What was the thrust then? Was this to get homosexuals out or...?

BLUE: The whole pressure was that we were going to change the Service from the Ivy league crowd to a more representative Foreign Service. I will never forget one of these guys in Pete Martin's office said to me one day, “You are an awful nice fellow to have gone to Princeton.” I said I didn't go to Princeton. The atmosphere was very anti-Foreign Service. They brought in a lot of so-called personnel experts. Almost everybody, with the possible exception of the European personnel section, was brought in from the outside. Certainly the chap who was in charge of my office, who was a perfectly nice man, but who knew nothing about the Foreign Service. Durbrow came in fairly soon.

Q: Elbridge Durbrow.

BLUE: Yes. He came in fairly soon after that and began at least to battle for the Service. The guy previous to him just bent like a sapling in the wind. By the time I left at least Foreign Service officers were running the Personnel Section.

Q: You then went to New Delhi where you served from 1952-55. What were you doing there?

BLUE: I was in the political section. Most of my time was spent taking care of visitors—Adlai Stevenson, Foster Dulles, Richard Nixon. I never was able to attend Hindi classes because I was so busy with all these visitors. I was the number two in the Political Section.

Q: What was the situation in India as we saw it—the American interests?

BLUE: Nehru was in his prime. It was a fascinating period to be there because Nehru was at the height of his power. And, of course, when Eisenhower came in our relations were very cool because of the decision to give military aid to Pakistan. As a matter of fact, when Nixon came he expected to be received with open arms but was only greeted at the airport by the military secretary of the President.

I did do something that the chief of protocol objected to, although he never said anything to me about it. The American Women's Club was making important contributions in many ways to an Indian school for kids of around 5 or 6. We had an embassy bus to take the kids to the airport. When Nixon and Pat arrived the kids presented him with leis. The chief of protocol looked at me as if to say, “You are the son of a bitch responsible for this.” At least Nixon didn't know who was responsible for these leis. But he got a very cold reception. By that time George Allen was there. Bowles was there when I first got there. He thought he was going to stay. I don't know why he thought that.

Q: Because Bowles was a Democrat.

BLUE: Yes. Rather controversial figure. In any case, George Allen came right away. To show you how little the White House anticipated the Indian press blackout of the visits, they sent an advance party which indicated to George Allen where and when they wanted the route of the Vice President to appear on the front page of all the papers every morning. And George Allen said, “There is not going to be any publicity about the Vice President's visit. The Vice President and the Administration are in the dog house as far as Nehru is concerned. So don't be surprised if you don't get any publicity at all.”

Q: Was there any attempt to call off the trip?

BLUE: No. He was making a trip all around.

Q: Your ambassador for a while was George Allen.

BLUE: I got there in January and George must have come out around March, I'm just guessing.

Q: How long was he ambassador there?

BLUE: He was there until late 1954 and then John Sherman Cooper came.

Q: Then you had two ambassadors there. Bowles had left...

BLUE: Bowles was there about a month and a half after I arrived. He left about a month or so before George arrived. After George Allen left, John Sherman Cooper came in. He was pretty hopeless because he had never been an ambassador. He had been a Senator from Kentucky for a long period. He was a nice man, but he would go to sleep during briefings and we would have to start all over. He was rather elderly. He had just married a woman who had chased him for seven years. My wife described her as the American bald eagle—she didn't have much hair. So, George was ambassador for most of the time I was there.

Q: And he was a professional.

BLUE: Yes, he was first class.

Q: During this period when you weren't doing your escorting, did you have much contact with the Indians?

BLUE: We had a lot of contact with the Indians and the Indian populace on the whole liked Americans. Bowles was very close to Nehru. I think he was quite effective with Nehru. George Allen was treated perhaps not as graciously as Bowles had been. The people in the Foreign Office were all Indian Civil Service, ICS. They did their job.

Q: Indian Civil Service going back to the British time.

BLUE: Oh, yes. The Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry was decked out in morning coat and stripe trousers. He was really very formal. I had difficulty with the much lower-ranking contact I was in touch with most of the time. He was rather cool and some things we wanted done were not done. The Indians were very independent. For example, we had several congressional visits thinking that they were going to tell the Indians where to get off and the Indians told them where to get off.

Q: It was also during the time of the Korean War in which the Indians, from our point of view, were not playing a very constructive role.

BLUE: They were playing games with the Chinese you see. That cooled relations even more. But I don't remember any unpleasantness. Nehru's principal private secretary was a very close and warm friend of ours. We stayed in contact with him long after we left. He has died but I still write his wife at Christmas.

Q: What about getting around and reporting on local developments?

BLUE: That wasn't a problem. We traveled a good deal. I got down to Madras, to Bangalore, to Bombay and Calcutta. I traveled around with several congressional groups and they were treated well. The only time they weren't treated well was when they were belligerent with people from the government and the people from the government had no intention of being pushed around by a bunch of American congressmen. As a matter of fact I admired them because the Pakistanis were bowing and scraping to an extent that was almost undignified.

Q: Were there any crises or great problems during that time?

BLUE: Goa was always a problem.

Q: Goa being at that time still under the Portuguese.

BLUE: It wasn't solved until around December 1961, just before I went to Lisbon.

The whole question of aid to Pakistan was a major problem. Also Kashmir. For example, I arranged for Adlai Stevenson to go up to Kashmir and stay on one of those house boats. While he was there the Indians decided they could use his visit...I think he called on Sheikh Abdullah who was working towards independence for Kashmir...Nehru used that as an excuse for denouncing Adlai Stevenson after he had gone. He said he had been consorting with Sheikh Abdullah encouraging his efforts to bring about the independence of Kashmir. We had very cool relations after that. As a result, the ambassador forbade any of us to go up to Kashmir.

Q: What did we feel about Soviet influence in India at that time?

BLUE: All the people in the CIA, and I suppose with good reason, felt that Mrs. Gandhi, who later became prime minister, was strongly influenced by the Soviets. We were concerned because the Indians tended to use our aid to Pakistan as an excuse for warming up their relations with the Soviet Union. But at that stage I don't recall that the

Soviets were giving them anything of importance. I think they were building a steel plant near Calcutta, but the Indians weren't purchasing aircraft or anything like that.

Q: You left there in 1955?

BLUE: I left there right before July 4 and was glad to get out of there. Ambassador John Sherman Cooper didn't want to have liquor for the July 4th party. He said that the Muslims didn't like it. I tried to point out to him that there were not just Muslims, there were a lot of Hindus in India. I also said, “Mr. Ambassador you don't know how expensive fruit juice is.” Most of the juice was canned and very expensive. Also I said, “If you don't have liquor lots of people are not coming, and they will know that you don't have liquor. I won't tell them, the staff won't tell them, but they will find out.” I think he ended up having a place for those who drank liquor. You know, in Malaya they had a room upstairs where the men would go to have their drinks and the ladies stayed down stairs and drank tea or something.

Q: By the way, you had gotten married.

BLUE: I got married in October of '54 and Joan loved India. She had a wonderful time. We left India in late June. I was to be assigned to London as the Near East representative in the embassy. Meanwhile the Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, decided that I had not had a sufficiently broad experience in the Near Eastern area. I believe my refusal to be Indian Desk officer was also a factor in their decision. I wanted to go to Europe. Fortunately I had enough friends in Personnel so I received an assignment in the Paris embassy. But that fell through and I was sent to the NATO Defense College which was located in Paris.

Q: As a Foreign Service officer how did this work out for you? Were there any advantages?

BLUE: It was a relatively new assignment, but it was like the other war colleges in that you had representatives from all the services plus myself, representing the State Department.

The advantage, I guess, was that it was considered to be comparable in some way to the war colleges here—it was only five months. It was a wonderful experience of course to be in this atmosphere. It was worthwhile being associated with my own military colleagues and then colleagues of all the other NATO countries. There were a few, not very many, diplomatic representatives there from other countries.

Q: You did serve in Bern, Switzerland from '56 to '58.

BLUE: Yes, I went there directly from the NATO Defense College.

Q: Switzerland is just about the only Western European country that is neutral.

BLUE: Except for Spain and Austria.

Actually, it was good for my career because I was Deputy Chief of Mission, a class 2 job, when I was still a class 3 officer.

Q: Oh, yes. You were DCM.

BLUE: Frances Willis was unable to get her favorite so she went back to Washington to find out who was available and she must have chosen me for the job. It was a rather fascinating job. It was dull after being in India because we had no problems with the Swiss except over watches. We were trying to protect the American watch industry. We didn't succeed, but we were still struggling to protect it.

Q: Frances Willis was your ambassador. She was one of the first professional women ambassadors.

BLUE: She was the first.

Q: The first Foreign Service Officer...

BLUE: The first career woman ambassador.

Q: How did she operate? She was not ambassador there, it was still a legation there wasn't it?

BLUE: No, it had been changed to an embassy. She was opening all the classified mail. She was quite able but she still had a DCM mentality. She was certainly made an ambassador there because she was a woman. But she annoyed my wife by always emphasizing that she was a career Foreign Service Officer.

We got along very well. She was not hard to deal with. We had very little to worry about. We had a big CIA operation.

Q: I was going to say that Switzerland during the Cold War seemed to be a nest of intelligence operators on all sides.

BLUE: We also had an NSA unit.

Q: Yes, National Security Agency.

BLUE: The chief of the CIA was a man I was very fond of. He had a big staff, about ten people. Our political section had three. He was pretty good about keeping me informed. We had a problem when Henry J. Taylor came. We had to be very careful what we told him because he would go to Paris and talk to the American Mens Club using material we had discussed in briefings.

Q: Well, Henry J. Taylor. Can you give a little of his background?

BLUE: Yes. He replaced Willis and was apparently a friend of Eisenhower. He was assigned to Norway but said he didn't know anybody in Norway. However he did know some people in Switzerland, so they shifted Frances to Norway and sent Taylor to Bern. He had been a journalist; a correspondent for Scripps Howard. Had written quite

a number of books. Also had a program on the radio for 11 years for General Motors called “Your Land and Mine.” He was a super-patriot type. We got along pretty well. I had problems...trying to keep him from taking classified documents home and things like that. After I left he got himself in a mess. Somebody said to me, “As long as you were there he stayed out of trouble.” I said, “Look, it was good luck on my part because he could have easily gotten into trouble while I was there, I did my damnedest to keep him out of trouble.”

Q: What sort of trouble did he get into?

BLUE: Apparently some AP man came to see him about an article he wanted to write called something like “Switzerland, Center of Arab Activity and Espionage.” In any case it dealt mainly with Switzerland being a center of espionage. The man showed his draft to Henry J. Taylor, and unfortunately Henry J. wrote in some changes. It came to light that he had had something to do with this and the Swiss were furious. They called him in, this was after I was gone, and gave him hell. The Department couldn't deny this. In fact the AP said that if the Department denied it they would release the draft with the ambassador's annotations.

Q: Finally they got you back to Washington.

BLUE: I replaced John Burns as Executive Director of the European Bureau in August of 1958. He was moving up to be an assistant to Loy Henderson who was the Deputy Under Secretary for Administration. We dealt with personnel, representation, well, all the administrative problems of the European Bureau. It was an interesting job.

Q: What were some of the major problems that you dealt with?

BLUE: The major problem I dealt with when I first got there was to reduce our personnel by 300 positions because we were saddled with what you might call incompetents from other areas. They would send them to Europe because they wanted to get rid of them, number one, and number two, they had been in the tropics and this would allow them to go

to a decent post. The position came with the individual. With the necessity of opening up new posts in Africa, etc. the pressure became so great that they reduced the complement of personnel in the European area. So I had to go through that reduction, which made me very unpopular with people in the field.

The problem of representation was always a can of worms. It shouldn't have been but it was because we didn't have enough money. For example, when I got to Bern, Ms. Willis' representation allowance for the year was $600 and the air attach# spent that much on one party. So that was another problem for us.

We were also reducing other expenses. We had to reduce the number of automobiles in Europe. You would think that things like that could be done without any trouble. The ambassadors all came back with strong telegrams to the assistant secretary saying you can't do this, you can't do that. And, we had no choice but to do it.

Q: What was your impression of the coming of the Kennedy Administration when you were in Western European Affairs?

BLUE: I was fascinated because I was a great Kennedy fan. He lived across the street. It was a very exciting period to be in Washington. He was the first President born in this century. He brought in all these interesting people. Kennedy had a tremendous interest in foreign affairs. For example, he would call us up directly, which would upset those around the Secretary, they were furious. You would pick up your phone and would hear, “This is John Kennedy.” It was uncanny. For example, the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands was coming over. The President called to say, “I want all the files for the last several years to and from the Hague.” He took them up to Hyannis Port and literally worked over the weekend reading all of this material. So he was ready.

This was one of the most interesting jobs I ever had, both in EUR/EX and in Western European Affairs.

Q: What were you doing in Western European Affairs?

BLUE: My boss was Bob McBride. I was dealing with Belgium and the Congo.

Q: This was when the Congo blew up.

BLUE: The Congo was becoming independent and you had all that unrest down there. The Belgian ambassador was coming into the office crying. It was a distressing period.

We had problems with the Portuguese because we were supporting opposition elements in their colony, Angola.

Q: Did you find yourself in a fight with the African Bureau in your dealings with the Belgian Congo?

BLUE: Oh, yes. I was in an eternal battle with the African Bureau and with the Administration. For example, George McGhee, previously assistant secretary for Near East Affairs, and then under Kennedy on the Policy Planning Staff, was very pro any of the African countries that were trying to get independence. I certainly was not a colonist but we had to cope with legitimate protests. I remember one of the problems I had was with the Dutch over an island claimed by Indonesia, West Irian. The Dutch ambassador was in all the time. I used to have to go up and take notes for his talks with Rusk.

Q: What was the type of interests that you were concerned with regarding the Belgian Congo?

BLUE: Mainly we were trying to placate them because these developments were going on whether we liked it or not. They began before Kennedy came in. I remember stories were going around about Lumumba who was prominent in the Congo, who came to the States and the story was that he asked for a passenger list and they asked him why. He

said, “Well, I want to pick out my meal for the day.” When Kennedy came in the pressure became even greater and the Belgians were unhappy by that time.

Q: How would things be resolved between the European Bureau and the African Bureau?

BLUE: Most of your fights would be over telegrams, instructions going out to Brussels. There we had Douglas MacArthur as ambassador, who wrote all these long bleeding telegrams. His successor was just as bad. We had to cope with them...had more troubles with them than the African Bureau. There were disagreements, but fortunately we were able to resolve most of them.

About the time Kennedy came in I went off to Lisbon. The foreign minister there was raising bloody hell all the time about Angola and Mozambique. They were having all these problems. We were supporting elements there which were for moving in the direction of independence. Of course, he complained about that.

Q: You went to Lisbon as deputy chief of mission. Who was your ambassador when you first arrived?

BLUE: Burke Elbrick.

Q: Could you describe how he dealt with things?

BLUE: He was a real pro. He was very effective. He dealt with things in a very professional way and was very well liked by the Portuguese. Although, we were in contact with some elements, through our CIA operations, which were opposed to Salazar. The Portuguese government knew this.

Q: How did you see the political situation in Portugal at that time—1962-65?

BLUE: It was pretty bad. Burke was there when George Ball went through on his way to Tehran and Cyprus. When he came back I was Charg#. We went to call on the foreign

minister, Franco-Noguiera. After seeing him Ball said, “You know, that guy could be the foreign minister of Czechoslovakia; you wouldn't have to change any of his ideas.”

Burke handled them pretty well. He knew them all and he could talk to them. He was fairly persuasive and smooth. Of course, George Anderson came in and was pro-Salazar.

Q: Could you give the background of George Anderson?

BLUE: He was Chief of Naval Operations and I guess he got in trouble, at least the reason they sent him to Portugal was to get rid of him. For some reason, John Kennedy and the people around him, thought that he was a threat for the elections that were coming up in 1964. Also he had thrown McNamara out of the Pentagon's operation center during the crisis over Cuba. In any case he was in the dog house with Kennedy and his staff. So they sent him to Lisbon and he wasn't very happy about being there. He had never had a post like that. His career had always been in the Navy in major positions. He was very favorable to the Salazar government.

By the time Lyndon Johnson came, the emphasis of doing something about Africa shifted. Lyndon wasn't interested in Africa. So at the end of my stay and after I had left, the emphasis of doing something about the independence of Angola and Mozambique went in another direction. George Anderson considered me pro-African. Quite frankly I was never all that interested. I cannot get all that excited about Africa. I had no problems with them having their independence, but I knew there were going to be real, deep problems when they got independence. But he thought of me as a crusader for the independence of Angola and Mozambique. All I was doing was following instructions from the Department. I was briefed by George Ball and Averell Harriman and they told me what to do. I was kept there to watch Anderson.

Q: As deputy chief of mission, you were told to keep an eye on George Anderson?

BLUE: If you had observed him in action, you would understand their concern.

Q: I'm told he was sort of a loose cannon from the military.

BLUE: He was anti-Kennedy for one thing. He was an interesting guy and quite effective with the Foreign Minister. His reports were good, but you never knew what had gone on really because he seldom took anyone with him to visit the Foreign Minister. Occasionally he would take the political officer. Ambassador Anderson was Roman Catholic. He and the Cardinal Primate were big buddies.

He arrived shortly before the Kennedy assassination. I left in December of '64 to come back for an operation. I went back for a short period in 1965, but to all intents and purposes my stay there was finished in December 1964.

Q: I assume while you were there the perennial problem of Azores bases must have come and gone and come.

BLUE: Burke Elbrick was in charge when we settled that. We signed an agreement so Anderson didn't get involved with the Azores crisis. That was a fascinating period when we were dealing with Franco-Noguiera. He had all these complaints about what we were doing in Africa. He kept bringing them in to the Azores discussion on his own in an effort to extract as much as he could out of it.

Q: What did the Portuguese think we were doing in Africa that they felt they could stop us from doing?

BLUE: They felt that we were encouraging the elements in Angola and Mozambique who wanted independence. Of course, we did have a CIA-supported group in the Congo operating into Angola and they knew this. They wouldn't let our ambassador in the Congo visit Angola. He wanted to visit Luanda, but they wouldn't let him go.

Q: How about Anderson, Elbrick or you, did you ever get down to Luanda and Lourenco Marques?

BLUE: They did, but I always had to stay back. Burke had been down and then Anderson went down. But whenever they went I had to stay in Lisbon as Charg#.

Q: What was their impression when they came back and you were talking to them about conditions in these colonies?

BLUE: Burke's attitude was totally different. He was fairly realistic in his outlook. George Anderson, of course, was fed the Portuguese line and was under their thumb the entire time he was there. Interestingly enough, the American military as a whole disliked our policy towards Angola and Mozambique. They were afraid that this would influence our situation in the Azores. So he, Anderson, had a sympathetic audience around him when he returned. He came back with a very favorable picture of conditions there. Of course, we were asking the Portuguese to do in Angola what they weren't even doing with their own people at home in Lisbon. We were asking them to give the locals more independence than the average Portuguese. The country was controlled by Salazar and two hundred families. It was a dictatorship all the way around.

Q: Was Portugal part of NATO at the time?

BLUE: Yes.

Q: Was Portugal in NATO because of the bases in the Azores?

BLUE: I suppose so originally. Acheson rather liked Portugal. He even liked Salazar. So I suppose they let them be in NATO even though they made very little contribution except for the Azores bases.

Q: In the early "70s I was in Greece and there were a lot of problems within the European Community, a lot of criticism because Greece was being run by the Colonels. In your period the only dictatorship in NATO was Salazar, were you getting pressure from our

European Allies to get them out or try to do something or was everyone pretty much resigned to Salazar?

BLUE: We didn't have any pressure. Certainly the British were not trying to get rid of him. The only fellow that I used to talk to about Salazar was the Italian ambassador. He was very interested in this whole question and we used to chat about what was going on, not only in Portugal but in the colonies as well. Burke knew the conditions that existed in Portugal. He was smoother about it, but he was trying to persuade these people that what the Kennedy Administration was asking was not unreasonable and if they didn't do something they would probably lose the colonies. But they weren't going to move.

Q: Did the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962 play any role while you were there?

BLUE: We didn't get our telegram on time. Every post was supposed to go to the Foreign Ministry and tell them what we were going to do with the blockade. We finally got the telegram. I got the Secretary General into the Foreign Office at midnight to deliver this note. I guess things started to happen on the high seas the next day.

Q: You left Lisbon in 1965. This was for medical reasons?

BLUE: Yes, I had a retina detachment. Actually I never went back except for a two week period. So for all intents and purposes I left in December of 1964.

Q: What were you doing in the State Department then?

BLUE: When I first came back I was on medical leave for a long time. Then I worked for a while with Personnel. Then I was assigned to the Inspection Corps for a short time. The interesting job I had was as director of international affairs for the upcoming Bicentennial. This was a fascinating job. We even had money to spend.

Q: What was that about?

BLUE: We were trying to encourage participation by foreign countries in the Bicentennial. It was a difficult period because in the very early stages the Administration hadn't decided what it wanted to do. We were fooling around with having an international exhibition in Philadelphia; first in Boston, this was pressed by John Kennedy, and later Philadelphia was trying to be the center of it. So we were struggling with that. But the Nixon Administration was not willing to put up the money for that kind of an operation. And the Nixon Administration didn't have any other plans, because the President was so involved in Watergate. So most countries were reluctant to make commitments until our proposals were clear. The French were talking about a son et lumiere show at Mt. Vernon; the British were talking about various things. But nothing really got off the ground until Nixon left the scene. John Warner came in as Administrator. The previous group appointed by Haldeman and Ehrlichman consisted of people like David J. Mahoney, who was big business, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Norton Simon, who didn't know anything about international affairs. But the Congress got so fed up with him that they forced him to get rid of his Deputy and in consequence David Mahoney resigned also. So Warner came over to replace him and that was when interest in the Bicentennial picked up. We developed the Tall Ships program and other plans. As a result, many countries, particularly Japan and Australia and European allies, developed their own programs for participation. It was a very interesting job. We had a Franklin/Jefferson exhibit that went to Paris, Warsaw and London and then back to the States and eventually to Mexico City. The Smithsonian had projects—an international exhibits program. They also had international participation in their Folk Festival on the Mall. We contributed money to them.

Q: It was very well done.

BLUE: It was a fascinating job. For example, at one stage we had a big battle with everybody except John Warner because the Smithsonian needed $500,000 for the Folk

Festival, otherwise they were not going to be able to have it. I went to bat and to my surprise won. The Bicentennial ended in June of 1977 and then I retired.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very, very much. I have enjoyed this.

BLUE: I enjoyed chatting with you.

End of interview